



Collaboration Success: Uncompahgre Plateau

The Uncompahgre Plateau Project (UP Project) in southwestern Colorado is a new and experimental method for managing public/private lands through a collaborative community-based process. Project participants study the impacts of human activity on the 1.5 million-acre Uncompahgre Plateau, conduct ecosystem restoration projects, and reduce hazardous fuels involving local communities. Through its open, collaborative process among multiple levels of government and a range of interests, the UP Project reflects the strategy of the National Fire Plan 10-Year Comprehensive Strategy.

In its fifth year, the UP Project has received national attention for championing collaboration among the USFS, the BLM, the Colorado Division of Wildlife, the Western Area Power Administration, landowners, local governments (including five counties and eight towns), and interest groups including environmentalists, ranchers, and loggers. The UP Project has evolved into a multi-agency citizen-based effort that incorporates the region's economic, social, and cultural aspects along with the ecological health of the Plateau.

Native plant communities on the Uncompahgre Plateau are maturing and becoming less diverse and productive. As a result, water quality, wildlife habitat, and forage yields have declined and soil erosion and noxious weed invasion have increased. Changes on the Plateau have resulted from both natural processes and past management practices, including fire suppression and historic overgrazing. This area of Colorado has one of the highest rates of wildland fire starts in the state, with fuel conditions conducive to large fires. Furthermore, the population in the communities surrounding the Plateau is projected to double in the next 25 years, increasing the pressure on the wildland/urban interface. These conditions led to the formation of the UP Project and its goal of restoring the Plateau in a manner that involves and best serves the interests of the local community.



Since inception, more than 30,000 acres have been treated to reduce fire risks and improve wildlife habitat and land health on a landscape level. The project has fostered programs to produce and harvest native plant seeds for restoration, consolidate agency data sets, support research to improve scientific knowledge, promote public education and involvement, and assist monitoring efforts. UP has received over \$4 million in funding from agencies and organizations including the Habitat Partnership Program, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Colorado Mule Deer Foundation, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, National Resources Conservation Service, and the Western Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education Program.

Through collaboration, the partners have accomplished much more together than could have been accomplished individually. The agencies have worked closely to implement programs that share planning, GIS data, equipment, and funding. Collaboration among more than 75 partners has become an integral part of the planning and implementation of on-the-ground projects.

The UP Project is a model framework to achieve and promote NFP goals as, perhaps, said best by UP Project partners:

- *“Five years ago, we still had three ranger districts in the Forest Service and two BLM field offices all essentially going about their business independently. Since then, with the leadership of the UP program, we are now all focused on coordinating our efforts for the common goal of restoring health and diversity of the Uncompahgre Plateau.”* Floyd Reed, Retired Rangeland Specialist, USFS
- *“I think the UP Project represents citizen collaboration at its best – working to redirect public land agency management across whole landscapes and thus better protecting the land and all its resources.”* Art Goodtimes, San Miguel County Commissioner
- *“UP is a part of a grand movement that is finally taking shape in the country: protecting contiguous ecosystems and cultural landscapes. It inspires me beyond reckoning.”* Angie Krall, Tribal Conservation Corps

For more information, check the Project website at upproject.org